

Last week I wrote about the lack of equipment and manpower in those departments of the divisions of what was formerly known as the Ministry of the Environment that are charged with the stewardship of wildlife. Now these departments are part of an omnibus ministry known as Forest, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations, or FLNRO.

This reorganization and consequent name change was made toward the end of the rule of the most unprincipled premier in this province's history, Gordon Campbell. Instead of jamming a number of ministries together while reducing their budgets, a responsible government would keep them intact, increased their funding, and done a thorough review of their mandates while developing a plan for how they would proceed.

The long and enduring downturn in the province's logging industry was — and is — a result of shabby management and unsustainable logging practises. For a responsible government, this state of affairs would have been a big red flag, a clear signal that things had gone sideways in our forests and that it was, therefore, time to shift to an environmentally sensitive paradigm with an emphasis on innovative logging practices in concert with economically sound wood processing practices that create long-term, well-paying jobs.

This was not a concern for Campbell and his apprentice Christy Clark, who've allowed forest corporations to police them-

selves and accelerate the export of raw logs.

The strip mining of an enormous portion of the provincial forest has left behind miles and miles of road in its wake. The increased access provided by these roads has put much more pressure on wildlife, increasing the need for protection while simultaneously making the job of protection far more difficult. Notwithstanding the demands of this critical situation, Christy Clark and her minions feel that, including summer help, a

dozen conservation officers are sufficient to effectively patrol Skeena Region, an area approximately the size of Switzerland.

Last week I suggested that a corps of about 100 well-resourced officers would still be insufficient for this task. But, it would be a step in the right direction if we are going to make any reasonable attempt at protecting an invaluable part of our heritage and a vital part of the largest contributor to the provincial economy.

An enforcement presence of this size would not be enough to take care of the kinds of watershed specific problems I've previously alluded to. To do this the enforcement presence could be augmented



SKEENA ANGLER
ROB BROWN

Poachers 5

by river guardians. Just after they saved the largest intact chunk of temperate coastal rain forest in the world, the Haisla put in place a group of guardians they called Watchmen to see that the struggling grizzly bear population of the Kitlope wasn't hunted to extinction by guides and to guard against log rustling. The good program lasted for a few years, and then, I suspect, withered because of funding. The Kitsumkalum have had an enforcement presence for a number of years now. The Gitwangak, Gitanyow, Kispiox, and Kitselas have all become involved in the fish and game resources that inhabit their traditional territories. The federal government provides a lot of financial support for the fisheries projects, but given the fact that they are dragging their heels on treaty talks, and given the fact that the indigenous peoples of this country have been victims of the mass kidnapping and abuse of their children as part of a program of cultural genocide, and had, among a litany of other crimes, the central feature of their economy, the salmon fishery, dismantled, this funding seems paltry.

The Kitsumkalum, like all indigenous

peoples in Skeena, were pushed into small sections of their territories from where they watched, powerless, as their traditional fisheries were destroyed and their river valley stripped of old growth trees vital to the ecosystems of those same fisheries.

Stripped of their traditional means of making a living and the essential self-esteem those practices entailed, stripped of jobs then forced into the systemic servitude of welfare, the First Nations received next to nothing in compensation as billions of dollars of timber was torn from lands they had never conceded.

Though it's almost too little, too late, the Kitsumkalum, who have demonstrated their concern for the wilderness values in their valley, need to be given enough money and resources from both levels of government to establish an effective enforcement presence in the watershed that bears their name. This may mean a corps of a dozen guardians. It may mean more. The Kitsumkalum will be able to determine how many. Such a force could effectively enforce the moose hunting ban and see that the illegal dumping so prevalent in the valley comes to a halt.

Such a program could and should be extended to every river valley in Skeena. In essence, the governments provincial and federal would be giving the river valleys and control over them to the people to whom they rightfully belong. I'm confident they would, given such an opportunity, do a damn sight better job than we descendants of Europeans have.